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LETTER FROM MRS. CHARLES PINCKNEY TO
HARRIOTT HORRY¹

Annotated by Joseph W. Barnwell

MY DEAR CHILD

You wish me to inform you what I recollect of the introducing and culture of Indigo in this Country. You have heard me say I was very early fond of the vegetable world, my father was pleased with it and encouraged it, he told me the turn I had for those amusements might produce something of real and public utility, If I could bring to perfection the plants of other Countries which he would procure me: accordingly when he went to the West Indies he sent me a variety of seeds, among them the Indigo, I was ignorant both of the proper season for sowing it, and the soil best adapted to it. to the best of my recollection I first try'd it in March 1741, or 1742, It was destroyed (I think by a frost). The next time in April, and it was cut down by a worm; I persevered to a third planting and succeeded, and when I informed my Father it bore seed and the seed ripened, he sent a man from the Island of Monserat by the name of Cromwell who had been accustomed to making Indigo there, and gave him high wages; he made some brick Vats on my Fathers plantation on Wappo Creek and then made the first Indigo; It was very indifferent, and he made a great mistery of it, said he repented coming as he should ruin his own Country by it, for my Father had engaged him to let me see the whole process. I observed him as carefully as I could and informed Mr. Deveaux an old Gentm. a neighbour of ours of the little knowledge I had gained and gave him notice when the Indigo was to be beat; he saw and afterwards improved upon it, not withstanding the churlishness of Cromwell, who wished to deceive him, and threw in so large a quantity of Lime water as

¹ This letter published by permission of the Charleston Library Society is omitted from those printed by Mrs. Harriott Horry Ravenel in her book *Eliza Pinckney*. The planting of indigo, supported by a bounty in Colonial days, came to an end when the province was no longer under the British Crown, and when cotton planting became profitable, owing to the invention of Whitney's gin, in the last years of the eighteenth century.

to spoil the colour. In the year 1744 I married, and my Father made Mr. Pinckney a present of all the Indigo then upon the ground as the fruit of my Industry. The whole was saved for seed, and your Father gave part of it away in small quantities to a great number of people that year, the rest he planted the next year at Ashipo for seed, which he sold. as did some of the Gentlemen to whom he had given it the year before; by this means there soon became plenty in the Country. Your father gained all the information he could from the french prisoners brought in here, and used every other means of information which he published in the Gazette for the information of the people at large.

The next year Mr. Cattle sent me a present of a couple of large plants of the wild Indigo which he had just discovered. Experiments were afterwards made upon this sort, which proved to be good Indigo, but it did not produce so large a quantity as the cultivated sort. I am

Your truly affectionate mother,
ELIZA PINKNEY.

Sept. 10th, 1785.